

Gratitude and the Gospel

Colossians 1:1-8

January 5th, 2020

Intro

It's January 5th which means that many New Year's resolutions are still afloat while others have already sunk like the Titanic.

Of course there's value in seizing on a new year to implement changes that you know need to take place. Most of us do it, most of us fail. It's estimated that only 8% of people follow through on their resolutions which means 92% do not. The author Brad Larsen lists five things our failed resolutions tell us:

1. We're unable to change ourselves.
2. We don't even know what we want. – we set goals and then part way through realize they aren't really what we are after
3. We have an unhealthy and unrealistic interest in our earthly future.
4. We're not content in every circumstance.
5. We need Jesus.

He also gives a few recommendations for making resolutions more effective:

Set realistic resolutions that are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely.

Seek counsel, and accountability, from brothers and sisters in Christ.

Make sure your resolutions align with God's Word and with God's aim to glorify himself by magnifying your joy in him.

It's that last point that launches us into our study of the Word today. We start a new book today, the book of Colossians. We'll circle back at the end to some resolutions we might commit to that align with this book.

Theme verse that provides a rough outline

Colossians 2:6-7 Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk in Him, ⁷ having been firmly rooted *and now* being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, *and* overflowing with gratitude.

“As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord”

“having been firmly rooted”

The first couple chapters explain who Jesus really is and what He has accomplished. For the Colossians, it was a reminder, and it may be so for you as well.

“So walk in Him”

The last couple chapters explain how we can walk in Him in daily life

“and now being built up in Him and established”

Do you like deep, rich doctrine about the nature of Christ – it's in this book!

Do you like practical, down to earth instruction on how to live – it's in this book!

1. Colossians: From ***Paul*** to the ***saints*** in Colossae (1:1-2)

- a. There was a standard format to a letter in Paul's day, just like there is today.
 - i. Our format is brief – “Dear ..., [body]. . . Sincerely, ...”
 - ii. Their format was a little more detailed but that's why the beginning and ending of so many of the small New Testament books that we call epistles (letters) sound so similar.
- b. Paul wrote this letter from prison while in Rome waiting to appear before Caesar (Acts 28:16-31). We know this from the letter itself as he describes a fellow prisoner along with him in 4:10.
 - i. He was on a type of house arrest that allowed him to correspond and even receive visitors. During this time he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon, as well as Colossians.
 - ii. Timothy was with him as Paul mentoring this younger brother in the faith. 5 other NT books list Timothy in the intro.
- c. To the saints in Colossae
 - i. Colossae was a city in the Lycus river valley of what is now western Turkey. For 5 centuries it had been influential and diverse. But in the decades prior to this letter it was in decline as the nearby cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis gained more influence.
 - ii. Paul had never been there. He's writing to people he had never met. In v 4 he mentions that he is writing after he heard of their faith.
 - 1. The church was planted by Epaphras a few years earlier, a local who had come to Christ through Paul's ministry in nearby Ephesus and then returned home.
 - iii. Within a few years of this letter Colossae would be knocked down by an earthquake and never rebuilt. You can go there now and all you'll find are some bits of stone sticking out of the ground. What remains is this letter.

2. Deep ***gratitude*** to God (1:3-8)

Paul gives thanks to God for good things he is about to describe about the Colossians.

Even the good changes in people have their source in God, so it's appropriate to thank him for that. That keeps us from living like practical atheists.

There are 3 cardinal virtues that he gives thanks for – their faith, love, and hope.

God has produced these things – so Paul is thanking God.

But the people should also be encouraged as they are described.

So should we. If we see them in our midst – in our church and in our lives its an evidence that the Lord is at work.

If they are lacking, we should ask God to cultivate them.

- a. Because of your ***faith*** in Christ (1:4a)
 - i. What had reached Paul's ears through the messenger Epaphras was this group of people in a neighboring community what had believed in Jesus. Their faith was in Christ.
 - ii. It wasn't just the way faith is used sometimes today – “they're a person of faith” “they are part of the faith community” – as in the most important thing is that they believe . . . something. It's WHO their faith is in – Christ.

- iii. The glory and preeminence and supremacy of Jesus above all things is the dominant theme of this book.
 - 1. They have received Him and now need to learn to walk in Him, they are rooted in Him and now need to be built up in Him (2:6-7)
 - 2. They have trusted in the person and work of Jesus. Because of that Paul described them the way he did in the intro – saints and fellow brothers and sisters – even though he had never met them! Even though they have areas to grow in – the second half of the book will deal with anger, parenting, marriage, honesty, patience, and other very down-to-earth problems.
- iv. What’s true of them is true of you if you have saving faith in Christ – you’re a saint, you’re part of God’s family.
 - 1. Even if you still need to work on your anger. You might not call it anger. You might domesticate it by saying you “get irritable,” “are feeling crabby,” “woke up on the wrong side of the bed.”
 - 2. Even if your marriage needs work.
 - 3. Even if nobody is going to invite you to write a parenting book.
 - 4. Because your faith is not in your performance your faith is in Christ. And whether you have a little faith or a lot of faith, it’s the object that matters.
 - 5. Illustration – We’ve been watching a reality tv show on life in Alaska. Every episode is the same – something might be trying to eat them, the ice may or may not hold them. They don’t know how thick the ice is so they need to be careful. But their safety doesn’t depend on their confidence or “faith,” it depends on how thick the ice really is.
 - a. The ice we are walking on is 10ft thick and solid as granite. It’s Jesus Himself.
- b. Because of your **love** for your new family in Christ (1:4b)
 - i. Another thing that encouraged Paul and led him to thank God was a report about their love – not just a generic love but a love for their new family in Christ.
 - ii. That kind of love is an evidence that God is at work –
 - 1. **1 John 4:7-8** Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.
 - 1. **1 John 3:16-18** We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷ But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.
 - a. This was the text for the message I gave at Matt and Alyssa’s wedding. As they say their vows they love with their words – they pledge to be committed in sickness and health, for richer for poorer, etc. And those vows are meaningful. However, if they don’t follow up by loving in “deed and truth” then what do the vows really mean?
 - iii. Lori has mentioned to me that one of the things that has encouraged her and Randy is the way the “spiritual family” has shown them care and support.

- iv. It's hard to love in "deed and truth" people that you don't really know.
 - 1. Show up to the regular gatherings on Sunday morning
 - 2. Get to know the people around you
 - 3. Set as a minimum goal for a commitment level of "Sunday +1"
 - a. Sunday morning worship plus ABF (Sunday school)
 - b. Sunday morning worship plus a small group
 - c. Sunday morning worship plus serving at Awana
 - d. Sunday morning worship plus having people in your home for a meal
- c. Because of your unshakeable **hope** in heaven (1:5)
 - i. I think the best way to read this verse is not that Paul is merely giving thanks for their hope in heaven, but that their hope in heaven is what is motivating their love for one another.
 - 1. Their new hope based not on the prosperity of their community but on their sure future with the Lord after this life ends.
 - ii. New Testament authors circle back to this often –
 - 1. **Titus 1:1-2** Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, ² in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago,
 - 2. **1 Peter 1:3-4** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,
 - iii. In prosperous countries in prosperous times, we can be guilty of thinking too little of heaven.
- d. Because the **gospel** has produced all of this as it spreads and changes people (1:6-8)
 - i. "the word of truth, the gospel" that they heard and understood is simply that for those who believe in Jesus as He really is they are reconciled to God, adopted into His family, fully forgiven, given Jesus' righteousness, and have a certain hope of heaven with Him.
 - 1. This was the message of "the grace of God" that they "heard and understood" (1:6)
 - ii. But that message was being distorted and challenged in Colossae and can be in every age.
 - 1. This letter addresses the distortions they encountered – making Jesus less than God, making his death on the cross less than sufficient (adding in a need to live in "self-abasement and severe treatment of the body" (2:23).
 - 2. Perhaps that's why Paul said, this is the "word of truth" – don't be deceived.
 - 3. There was a false message Paul was countering which does not offer a reliable basis for hope
 - 4. The word of truth is a message that can be relied upon – we live in an era of accusations of "fake news" misleading reports where we wonder whether the info we are getting is reliable – people wonder that across the political spectrum.
 - 5. There is a natural tendency when people feel like they have been deceived to question everything. People might leave a religion that they grew up in and rather than landing

on a firm faith in the real Jesus, they abandon all belief out of skepticism. While understandable it's still an overreaction.

- iii. That gospel had come to them through one of their own – Epaphras – who cared enough to take the gospel that he likely heard from Paul in Ephesus back to his own people.
 1. And it was through similar human, unspectacular means.
 2. Tertullian – end of second century – non-Christians are but of yesterday – We have already filled your cities.
 3. By end of third century – name of Christ either known, revered, or persecuted in nearly every colony.
 4. Shaft – estimated 10% of all Roman subjects by 3rd century. About 10 million
 5. No missionary societies or institutions but between 30 and 300 A.D. a large part of the Roman world was won. The churches all considered it their responsibility. No known names or missionaries until later in church history.
 - a. Later are people like St. Patrick to Ireland and others. In early church history it was just the common people.
 - b. Early Christian community was a community on mission.
 - c. Message was not to be limited to any specific class or race or condition. It was good news for all.
 - d. As Christianity moved throughout the whole of the inhabited world, Christians had the privilege of sharing the joy that they had with others.

3. New Year's resolutions from Colossians

- a. Resolve to sink deep **roots** in Christ.
 - i. The means He has given us to know Him aren't a magic formula but they are the everyday, ordinary things He uses – spending time reading the Word (maybe read through Colossians along with this study), pick up a book that answers your questions, listen to the preaching of the word (listen online if there's a Sunday you miss), set apart time to pray
- b. Resolve to **love** and be **committed** to your brothers and sisters in the local church.
 - i. It's hard to feel connected and care about people if you only see them once per week, let alone once or twice per month. Don't wait until Sunday morning to decide whether you are coming to worship or not. Decide to gather every week, figure out what it takes Saturday night to get here Sunday morning.
 - ii. For example – pick out your kid's clothes, pour the cereal in the bowls, figure out whether the 8:30 or 11 service fits around their naps better, pray for the message and worship and the other people that will gather.
- c. Resolve to see the gospel **spread** in your community and beyond.
 - i. Locally - Invest, engage, explain, invite
 1. We shouldn't love people in order to share the gospel with them, but because we love them we should look for open doors to share with them.
 - ii. Globally – learn, pray, give, consider going



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